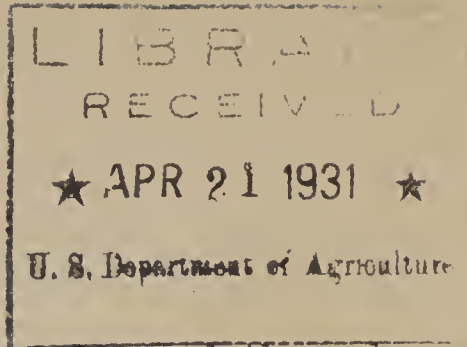


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GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, ~~delivered through~~ WRC and 40 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, April 7, 1931.

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How-do-you-do folks! The mere mention of rhubarb pies and rhubarb sauce may not strike a responsive chord in the minds of you folks who have always lived in the South, but to the members of the Farm and Home Hour audience who live anywhere north of the group of States that border on the Gulf of Mexico, rhubarb or "pieplant" as it is often called, brings pleasant recollections of great, juicy rhubarb pies with the sugar, perchance, boiling over the edge of the pietin in the oven and sending a most delightful odor all over the neighborhood. It makes me hungry to think about these wonderful rhubarb pies my mother used to bake, back in the days when I was a boy on the farm and hungry at least five times a day. "Why don't you tell us how to divide and transplant rhubarb," writes one of the farm and home hour listeners, and so we have rhubarb as one of our garden topics to-day.

Rhubarb is at its best in the northern and western parts of the United States, where the soils are loamy and where the winters are cold. Something rather strange about rhubarb for it likes cold and does its best in the parts of the country where the thermometer gets down around that figure that makes us all shiver just to think about it - ZERO. In other words the roots of rhubarb must freeze in the ground during the winter in order to produce, big, juicy leafstems in the spring and early summer. Rhubarb can be grown from seed but it takes about two years to get good roots by this method and the usual method is to dig a few of the old but vigorous and healthy roots, divide them and replant on new soil with plenty of fertilizer or manure, or both, to make the soil rich, the richer the better.

You see the old hills of rhubarb get thicker and thicker and the stems smaller and smaller until they are too small for the market and really too small for home use. Then it is time to dig a hill or two, shake off the old soil and carefully divide the roots into sections, each section having two or three good eyes or buds. This work must be done early before the buds start, it's most too late now except in the more northern States. In selecting pieces of root with which to start a new bed be sure that there is no rot or decay present and any broken or bruised places on the roots should be carefully trimmed off with a sharp knife. It is a good idea to make a new planting every four or five years, leaving a part of the old planting to furnish the supply until the new plants become established which will be in about two years.

As already suggested you need not fear making the soil too rich for rhubarb, use plenty of rotted manure and it is a good idea to work about a quart of bonemeal into the soil in and around where each hill is to be planted. Dig the soil deep and work the fertilizer and the manure to a depth of at least 20

inches or two feet. Place the hills at least three feet apart and cover the roots about 3 inches. There is nothing very difficult about growing rhubarb in sections where climatic conditions are suitable, plant it on good soil, use plenty of manure and fertilizer, keep the weeds down, and during the summer keep the seed-stalks cut off.

The forcing of rhubarb has become quite a winter industry in certain sections. The roots are first allowed to freeze then are lifted with considerable soil attached and transferred to forcing houses or cellars where a very delicate and tender growth is produced.

If, perchance, any of you are interested in the commercial production of rhubarb or in forcing it for the market, we will be glad to supply you with more detailed information by mail. Those of you who live south of the line where rhubarb grows more or less naturally, can occasionally grow some very fair rhubarb by shipping the plants from the north during the winter and planting them on the north side of a tight board fence where they will be well shaded. The plants soon run out, however, and it will be necessary to renew the plantings every second or third year.

Asparagus is another of our early spring vegetables that is deserving of greater attention. As a matter of fact the commercial production of asparagus for the market and for canning has increased by leaps and bounds during the past few years. The culture of asparagus is a rather long-time proposition and when a bed or field as the case may be is well established it will last many years under proper care. Asparagus, however, differs very materially from rhubarb in that it can be grown almost everywhere in the United States except possibly bordering on the gulf of Mexico, but I am told that certain people living in sight of the gulf have been fairly successful with asparagus. Anyway it's about the finest early spring vegetable and worth anybody's effort to grow it.

One hundred good, one-year, asparagus plants, on rich soil and with reasonable attention will furnish enough asparagus for the average family of say five persons. The plants can be secured from some nursery for about \$1.50 and should be set about 18 to 20 inches apart in a row at one side of the garden where they will not be in the way of plowing the remainder of the garden.

Like rhubarb, asparagus wants a deep, rich soil. Open a double furrow and work plenty of well rotted manure and some bone meal or any good fertilizer mixture into the bottom of the furrow then turn a little soil over the manure and allow it to settle. When the plants are received from the nursery unpack them and wet the roots to prevent their drying then set them 18 to 20 inches apart or even 24 inches is a better distance, spreading the roots out flat in all directions. Set the crowns so that they will be about five inches below the general level of the soil but do not cover them more than 2 or 3 inches at first. Keep the plants cultivated and free from weeds and it will do no harm to give them a little extra fertilizer about twice during the summer. Toward fall the remaining soil, or most of it, can be worked into the furrow about the plants but at no time should the crowns be covered more than 5 or 6 inches.

No cutting of the spears should be made the first year and only moderate cutting the second year. After the second year the spears may be cut over a period of six or seven weeks each year. Fertilize the plants every year, preferably at the close of the cutting period and dust or spray them frequently during the summer with arsenate of lead or some other poison to keep the beetles from eating the foliage. If any of you are interested in growing asparagus for the market we have a new bulletin that may be of help to you. It is Farmers' Bulletin No. 1646-F.

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